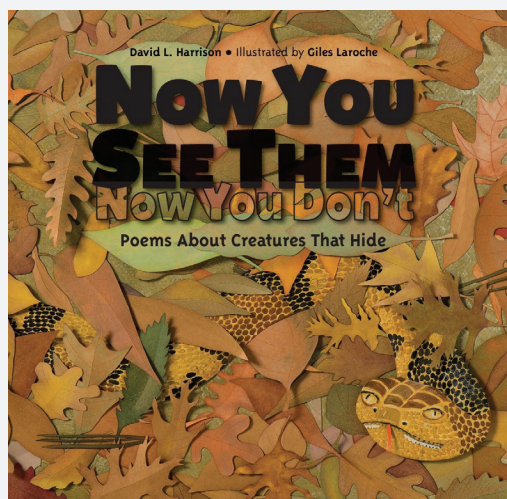


## Second Reaction: *Now You See Them, Now You Don't: A Delightfully Informative and Appealing Lyrical, Visual Animal Exposé*

Harrison, David L. *Now You See Them, Now You Don't: Poems about Creatures That Hide*. Illustrated by Giles Laroche, Charlesbridge, 2016.

Karla J. Möller



A carefully concealed copperhead, slithering through fallen burnt orange and fading green leaves, curls around the dust jacket of this engagingly written and illustrated picture book of poems about animal camouflage. Readers are invited into David Harrison's *Now You See Them, Now You Don't: Poems about Creatures That Hide* by illustrator Giles Laroche's image of a slightly menacing snake, whose head with staring eyes and extended tongue is positioned at the bottom right-hand corner of the front cover—just where a reader is likely to place a hand to open the book to richly saturated, blood-orange endpapers. The book's title foreshadows the content in words and design, with "Now You See Them" lettered boldly in deep chocolate brown and "Now You Don't" written in black-outlined, see-through block print. The title page extends this invitation further, repeating the depiction of a half-visible and half-camouflaged title that is now accompanied by an almost-hidden walking stick climbing its way toward the next page. As a first-time reader, I was immediately captivated.

Inside the unpagged picture book await nineteen lively poems about various animals' methods of self-concealment, with camouflage highlighted both as a protective defense from being eaten and as an offensive tool for securing other living creatures to eat. The series of poems is separated into five categories—sea life, reptiles and amphibians, mammals, insects

and spiders, and birds—and is accompanied by crisp and colorful painted-paper collage images that radiate energy and offer intricate details. Classified by the Library of Congress as “juvenile literature,” a marker for a nonfiction children’s book, the picture book offers readers interesting information about animals using camouflage for survival in each poem and on five pages of endnotes. Each endnote page contains specific, but brief, notes on the animals named in the poem titles for one of the animal categories, along with an additional book recommendation for further reading.

The poems shift between predators camouflaging to enhance their opportunities to catch their prey and those who are seeking safety by means of their background-blending skills. In all, there are 11 poems describing the benefits of camouflage from a predator’s perspective (“Common Octopus,” “Flounder,” “Reef Stonefish,” “Copperhead,” “American Alligator,” “Bengal Tiger,” “Polar Bear,” “Crab Spider,” “Praying Mantis,” “Screech Owl,” “Great Blue Heron”) and eight poems describing the value of blending in from a prey’s perspective (“Ghost Crab,” “Gray Tree Frog,” “Young Bullfrog,” “Fawn,” “Eastern Gray Squirrel,” “Moth,” “Walking Stick,” “Hawk”). The final poem stands out as the only one in which the title character is not the focus of the camouflage in discussion. Titled for a predator, “Hawk” describes the self-defense options of a mouse as prey from the point of view of an omniscient third-person narrator who warns the mouse of the approaching hawk: “Look up, mouse. / See the sky? / See that tiny / speck on high?” (Harrison unpagged). To follow the pattern of the other poems, this verse would have been titled “Mouse.” This incongruity is a little surprising and should lead a reader to wonder why this poem was not included in the mammals category, rather than in birds. The matching entry in the endnotes focuses on a description of hawks and their predatory behavior toward small mammals and reptiles. The seeming inconsistency between poem and endnote could lead to an interesting discussion with young readers.

Though nonfiction, fictional elements are intermingled throughout the book, with extensive personification in some poems serving to draw the reader into the animal’s experience more directly and to expand the poetic language’s descriptiveness. For example, an octopus who is “slyly shy” is hidden as it is “lurking by” waiting for the chance to, “with its octo-lethal charms, / hug its prey in sucker arms” (Harrison unpagged). The flounder on the opposite page informs the reader: “Patiently I watch and wait / for fish, crabs, unwary krill / to meet me for a dinner date” (Harrison unpagged). The poem “Ghost Crab” lists the “words ghost crabs know,” and the gorgeous copperhead is an author, writing a mischievously threatening letter to “Dear Mr. Vole.”

While including examples of predation, the often-humorous poems and detailed images avoid the overly morbid aspects of predator-prey relationships, though one of my favorites, “Crab Spider,” describes carnivorous behavior in a delightfully humorous way. In the endnotes, readers are told that some types of crab spiders “gradually turn the same color as the flower they perch on. Others are the color of their habitat” (Harrison). The poem describes it this

way: "Spider used / a bloom to hide it / until a fly / flew down beside it. / Then with spider's / attitude / the buzzy fly / became fast food" (Harrison). The only entry that actually depicts an animal in the act of being eaten is "Great Blue Heron." The illustration shows a green salamander caught in the bill of a gorgeously feathered heron. The poem, another highlight of the book, is cleverly laid out so that the spacing of the lyrical words, with their ear-pleasing alliteration and assonance, mirror the stillness of the waiting bird and then the slow movement forward until the final lightning strike that ends the hunt (Harrison unpaginated):

Standing

statue

still.

Slender

sharp

bill.

Slowly

aimed

spear.

Watching

drawing

near.

Tasty

treat

observed.

Strike!

Dinner's

Served

Throughout, the layered-paper artwork adds scientific details and a wonderfully dimensional dramatic effect that enhances both interest and understanding of the poetry and its

expressive qualities. The images and words are descriptive and easily understood, making this book an attractive read for children across elementary school grades.

Consider pairing this book with the exquisite *Where in the Wild: Camouflaged Creatures Concealed . . . and Revealed* by poets David M. Schwartz and Yael Schy and photographer Dwight Kuhn. *Where in the Wild* is laid out in double-paged spreads with riddle poems about animals on the verso and photographs depicting the described animals camouflaged in their environments on the recto. The right-hand page then folds out to reveal a second photo underneath that pinpoints the location of the animal in the image and a new recto (on the now three-page spread) that contains additional photographs and information about the animals highlighted. Especially engaging as a partner text, this book also includes entries on gray tree frogs, fawns, moths, crab spiders, and flounder. These two books are well worth having in any reader's library!

### Work Cited

Schwartz, David M., and Yael Schy. Photographs by Dwight Kuhn. *Where in the Wild: Camouflaged Creatures Concealed . . . and Revealed*. Tricycle Press, 2011.

### About the Author

**Karla J. Möller** obtained her PhD from the University of Georgia and is an associate professor and the associate department head for graduate programs in the Department of Curriculum and Instruction at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign. Her research and teaching focus on the selection and use of culturally diverse literature and nourish her interconnected interests in cultural diversity and language, reading and response to literature, and issues related to social justice, educational equity, and children's success in school. She conducts collaborative research with local teachers and is a co-editor of the *Journal of Children's Literature*.